

Occasional Notes.

DIALECTS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA.

I have been engaged for some time past in an attempt to collect and compare the various dialects of the Wild Tribes of the Peninsula and shall be much indebted to anyone who will furnish me with fresh material on the subject, with a view to its being embodied in a forthcoming publication. Any vocabularies, grammatical notes, specimens of sentences with literal (verbatim) translations, and even lists of personal names, would be welcome, if accompanied by a clear statement of (1) the name of the tribe to which they refer; (2) its location (district and state, and approximate position on the map) and, if possible, (3) a short description of its physical characteristics.

I venture to appeal to members of the Society, or their friends, who may have collected such information, but have not the leisure or the inclination to work it up themselves, to assist me in this way in the work of collating these dialects. Much valuable material remains unpublished and is ultimately lost because men, who have been at some trouble to collect it, keep it back with a view to completing it with additional matter which they eventually have not time to collect.

I am particularly in want of specimens of the aboriginal dialects of the Negri Sembilan and Pahang, but any information relating to the aborigines of the Peninsula will be most welcome.

While on the subject of dialects, may I venture to draw the attention of the members of the Society to the importance of accurately recording the various dialects of Malay which are spoken in the Peninsula. Apart from a few scrappy notes about the pronunciation of certain letters, practically nothing has been done in this department. There are now, however, in most districts of the Peninsula, Europeans well qualified by a more than adequate knowledge of standard Malay, and if each of them were to compile a record of the local peculiarities of

the dialect spoken in the particular district where he was stationed, the result would be an invaluable contribution to the scientific study of the Malayan languages. Local dialects, which were formerly neglected under the mistaken idea that they were mere corruptions of the standard or written language, are now recognized to be of great importance from the philological point of view, and in many countries they are being accurately recorded and studied. It is regrettable that in this respect we should lag so far behind the Dutch, who have by this time compiled more or less adequate records (some of them in every way admirable) of almost every language and dialect spoken in their vast section of the Archipelago. To take one instance, of which I have some slight personal knowledge: we possess an excellent Dutch dictionary of Menangkabau Malay and a goodly number of specimens in prose and verse, of that curious and interesting dialect, yet, though this same dialect, with slight variations, is spoken in Naning (Malacca) and the Negri Sembilan, where scores of Englishmen have heard it spoken, we have no adequate English record of it.

What is wanted, among other things, is an accurate account of

- (1) peculiarities of intonation and accent;
- (2) peculiarities of pronunciation of particular syllables, especially finals;
- (3) grammatical and syntactical peculiarities, if any, *e. g.* the use of prefixes or suffixes different from those of ordinary Malay; and differences in the construction of sentences;
- (4) preference for one of two synonyms where the standard Malay prefers the other;
- (5) the use of words with a meaning differing from that which they have in the standard language;
- (6) local words, simple and derivative, not found in the standard language;
- (7) local phrases, turns of speech and idioms.

Another subject which needs working up is that of place-names, both those that appear to be Malay and such as have no meaning in Malay and are probably in some cases Aboriginal.

These latter may eventually throw considerable light on that dark subject, the condition of the Peninsula prior to the Malay immigration.

I need hardly add that though I have specially dwelt on the Malay Peninsula, as the immediate domain of the Society's scientific interests, yet I do not mean to underrate the importance of contributions relating to other Malayan countries.

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